

THE INFORMATION BOOTH

Michael Knapp

Welcome to another installment of "The Information Booth." For those of you who are reading the column for the first time, it is here that I try to provide some information about unidentified flying chips (UFC's) submitted by members for identification, and to answer questions about casino history, chip history, or related subjects.

As I always do, I'll begin with some answers to previous UFC questions. Also, I repeat my request for participation by club members. This column is only of value if you take time to write to me with identifications of chips you recognize here in the column, and if you send *legible* photocopies (full size is a must; black and white is preferred, and please *do not send enlarged copies*) or samples of chips you'd like identified. Please don't assume that if you recognize a chip, someone else will. Don't assume that "everyone knows what that chip is." If you have information which may be of help to other members, please share it through this column.

There are always far more unidentified chips than there are members who write to me with answers. The purpose of this column is to try to identify chips that our members ask about. If you'd like this column to continue, it's important to share your knowledge of chips that your fellow members may not know about. Come on, collectors: help!

You will notice that very few of the chips which appear in the column are simply photocopied. That's because many older chips do not have enough contrast to photocopy well, and if they will not photocopy once, they certainly will not photocopy a second time when the magazine is published. As a result, I hand-illustrate most of the chips pictured here. It's a painstaking process, because I make every effort to make sure that each chip illustration is as close as possible to its original version. That way, recognition and identification may be possible.

Please realize that if you cannot read what is printed on a chip clearly after you photocopy it for the column, neither can I, and illustrating it will be

impossible. In such a case, you may send the chip to me, *with return postage* if you would like the chip sent back to you.

Also, please realize that if you recognize a chip published here as a UFC, you have information that your fellow collectors do not have. Please share. That's the whole point of this column. What is common knowledge in one area of collecting is completely unknown in others. For those of you with answers or questions, please share your information by writing to me at P. O. Box 340345, Columbus, Ohio 43234.

We have quite a few answers this time to previously-published UFC's. Following the UFC number are the volume and issue number in which the illustration of the chip originally appeared.

UFC 32 (2/3): This is one of the earliest chips we have had occasion to mention recently. The chip bears the initials **FB** and the address 150 North Main Street, but no city or state. Last year the chip was attributed to Frank's Bavarian, Salinas, CA. In Howard Herz's most recent auction catalog (No. 23), he attributes the chip to Fresno, CA.

UFC 143 (3/3): Another oldie—according to Howard Herz's auction 23, the **Savoia Club** was located in Stockton, CA in the 1940's.

UFC 179 (3/4): Club OK was a card club in Gilroy, CA.

UFC 517 (5/4): This chip bears only the initial **R**. The majority of these chips were found in Ohio, and Herz Auction 23 has now attributed the chip to the Riviera, W. Palm Beach, FL. The fact that the chip was used in Florida and found in quantity in Ohio is not inconsistent. Many club operators and dealers from Kentucky, Michigan and Ohio went south for the winter season, along with many of their regular customers, and set up illegal clubs along Florida's "gold coast" while temporarily shutting down many of the clubs in the north. The exchange between the midwest and Florida may explain the finding of these chips in Ohio.

UFC 614 (6/3): The **Fortune Cookie** card room was

located at 1354 East Avenue L, Chico, CA. It's now closed.

UFC 645 (7/1): Steve Piccolo wonders whether perhaps this chip, which says **Penthouse** and has a representation of a key, might have been a prototype or promotional chip for the planned Penthouse Casino in Atlantic City. The Penthouse never opened.

UFC 775 (8/4): The **Florida Casino** chip was denominated in Shillings, and Bob Quackenbush tells us that there is a Florida Casino in Mombasa, Kenya, where the British monetary system is still in use. Sounds right to us!

UFC 781 (8/4): In Auction 23, Howard Herz identifies this **CCC** chip as having come from the Coin Castle Casino in Las Vegas.

UFC 904 (9/2): Bob Quackenbush tells us that this chip, bearing the legend **C-C**, was used at the Chicago Club in Saratoga Springs, NY.

UFC 1035 (10/2): The **RHC** chip was made for Jim Contratto, 2800 Firestone Blvd., South Gate, CA, in 1944. We have no definitive word as to where it was used, however.

UFC 1047 (10/3): **Maggie's** is a card room in San Diego, CA.

UFC 1050 (10/3): Again, Howard Herz's latest auction catalog gives us the details on the **Pat Sullivan** chip. His research indicates that Sullivan was a chip distributor, then a salesman for Christy & Jones. The chip pictured in this column was a "calling card" sample which he used when he was with Christy & Jones.

UFC 1062 (10/3): Ernie Wheelden recalls that the **Mani-Carlo** is/was a club in Alberta, Canada, but he can't recall the city in which it was used or the circumstances.

UFC 1063 (10/3): Allan Myers tells us that the U. S. Playing Card Co. records show that this **GC** chip was shipped to distributor H. E. Mason Co. in Chicago in 1927, but there is no record of the ultimate customer. The initials might stand for "Garden Club," but we have no confirmation of that at this time.

UFC 1066 (10/3): The **9-11 Club** was a card club in Concord, CA.

UFC 1067 (10/3): Commerce, CA was the site of the **A.B.C. Club** card room.

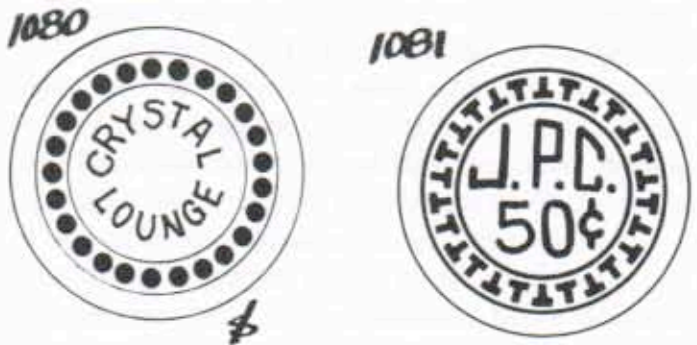
UFC 1071 (10/3): Rick Meyer, who has done extensive research into the card rooms in and around San Diego, tells us that **Club 36** was located at 3628

Union Avenue. It opened in 1974 and is now closed.

UFC 1073 (10/3): The **101 Club** may have been located in Turlock, CA, but we're not sure of that attribution. Does anyone from the area know for sure?

Some of the chips submitted for this issue can be identified, and others guessed at. As always, if you recognize a chip and can provide authoritative information about its origin, please drop me a note so that I can include your identification in the next issue of the magazine.

UFC 1080: The **Crystal Lounge** was located in Bozeman, MT at 123 East Main Street.



UFC 1081: I received a letter from Doc Finstuen, a serious student of chipology, who wrote "I am sending you what may be a 'first.' The issue of attribution is always a 'sticky' one, as you well know. I have found what may be the first check to ever appear in a national magazine . . . in an issue of *LIFE* magazine, dated June 19, 1950." The magazine article is entitled "Gambling In The U.S.: Life presents the low-down on nation's biggest racket" and pictures this **J.P.C.** chip prominently, with the caption "a 50¢ chip used in a dice game in Illinois."

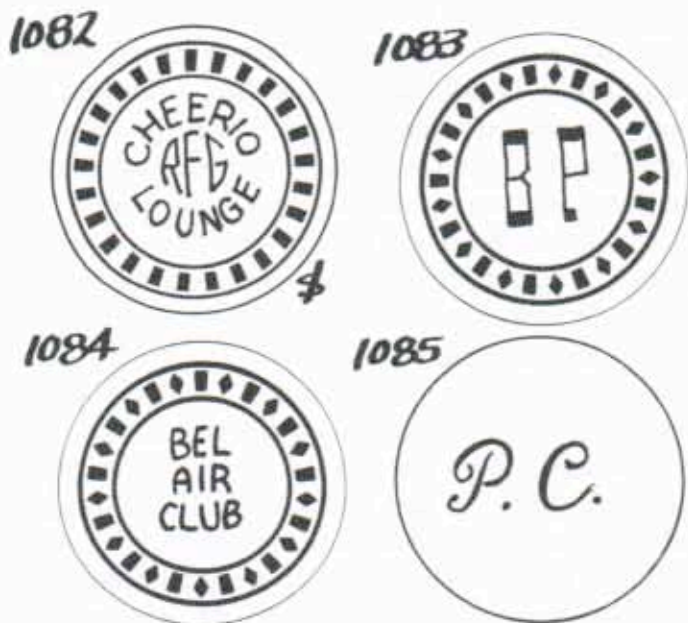
The article itself is hardly a major exposé, but it discusses the Kefauver Committee hearings and tells some good stories about gamblers. It seems likely that this chip was used in an illegal casino in the Chicago area, but unfortunately the article never identifies the club from which the chip came.

UFC 1082: The **Cheerio Lounge** was located in Laurel, Montana. The initials **RFG** stand for Rudy F. Grochelle, who apparently owned the club.

UFC 1083: Allan Myers thinks that this chip with the initials **BP** was made for Ben Paris in Seattle, WA.

UFC 1084: This **Bel Air Club** chip was probably used at the card room of that name in Concord, CA. Can

someone from the area confirm this?



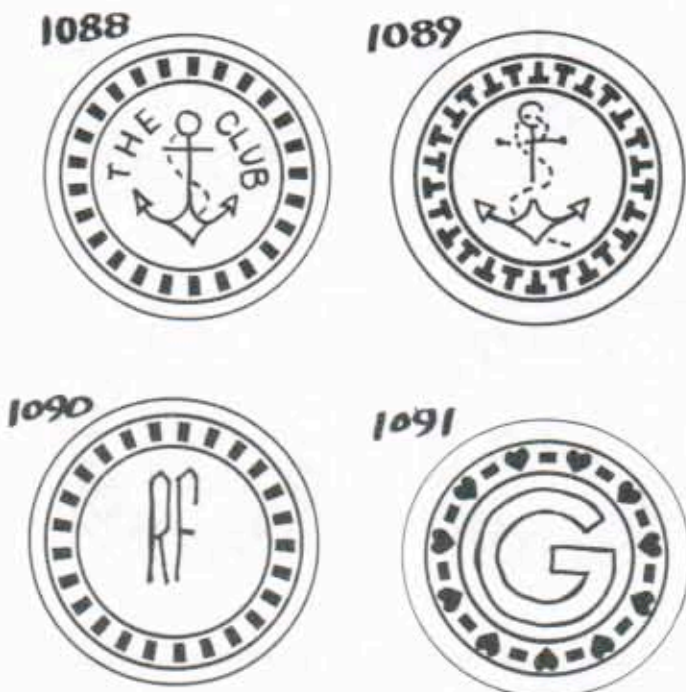
UFC 1085: It's difficult to show what this chip really looks like, so I'll have to make do with describing it. It's a red acrylic chip made to look like mother of pearl, with the engraved initials P.C. Al Zaika, who sent us this chip for identification, says that the person he got it from represented it as a Playboy Casino chip. Al's skepticism is well-deserved, we think! The Playboy chips were all of more recent manufacture than the pictured chip, and none, to my knowledge, lacked the little bunny head that is Playboy's trademark. This is a pretty chip, though—does anyone recognize it?



UFC 1086 and 1087: Barry Shoepf tells us that the following two chips were found together in Memphis, TN. The fact that the chips were found in Memphis doesn't necessarily mean that they were used there, of course, but it doesn't rule out the possibility that they were used there in an illegal club. Does anyone know of a "WSR Casino" in Memphis or elsewhere? Barry, by the way, also wins the eagle-eye contest of this quarter, having noticed that in the last issue I referred to the Beverly Hills Club as located in

Southpoint, KY rather than in Southgate, KY. Thanks, Barry!

UFC 1088 and 1089: These two chips are extremely interesting because they are virtually identical, except for the mold design and the lettering on one of the chips, and because they come from two different members: Rick Meyer in San Diego, and John Zoesch in Tennessee. Were it not for Rick's chip, which seems to be from a place called **The Anchor Club**, I would have suggested to John that he was looking at a generic roulette design chip. Given the similarity between the two chips, though, I'm hesitant to draw that conclusion. Can anyone help with these?



UFC 1090: This RF chip was shipped to Ross Fenton Farms in Asbury Park, NJ in 1934. Does anyone know anything about it?



UFC 1091: Allan Myers found this G chip in Louisville, KY, which is across the Ohio River from Jeffersonville, IN, home to a number of illegal clubs in the 1930's and 1940's. He thinks it's possible that it's

a previously-unknown style of chip used at the Greyhound Club, especially since the rectangle-heart mold was used in other clubs in the area, but he isn't certain of the attribution.

UFC 1092, 1093 and 1094: I love chips with a story! Bob Bickford sent these chips: **JB**, **JGH** and **9857**, and says "I drove all the way from Cleveland to New Jersey to buy the two pictured chips from a dealer from Toledo, Ohio." Now *that* we can all identify with! Unfortunately, I can't identify the chips for Bob. Does anyone recognize them?

1094



1095



1096



1097



UFC 1095: I am occasionally asked why I bother to publish illustrations of chips bearing only initials. Aren't they usually unidentifiable? If they bear no denominations, aren't they usually private issue chips, made for home use or given as executive gifts? The answers are that yes, they *are* difficult to identify, but therein lies the challenge, and the value of this column to the collector—the hope that someone will be able to authenticate a chip and share that knowledge with other collectors so that these "initial" or "monogram" chips will be connected with their true gaming history. This **MPM** chip is an excellent example of just this principle, as are the next several chips.

Club member Jim Myers showed me the **MPM** chip several years ago, and I sent one to Howard Herz. When he had the opportunity to do so, Herz had the foresight and ability to preserve much of the history of the H. E. Mason Company, a major distributor of chips, many of which were made for casinos and illegal

clubs.

Fortunately, using those records Howard was eventually able to identify the chip as having been shipped to a Pat Murnan in Columbus, Ohio, not a town usually associated with illegal gambling. Coincidentally, I read an article in the local paper not too long afterwards, recounting the story of Pat Murnan and his illegal club at 13½ West Broad Street, above a storefront at the corner of Broad and High Streets, the main intersection in downtown Columbus. Apparently from the 1920's through the 1940's, Pat Murnan was known as a "sportsman," whose casino was well known in Columbus. He also owned a horse farm which is now the site of a major suburban shopping center. As was the case with most illegal clubs, Murnan knew and was friendly with much of the Columbus police department, who turned a blind eye to his operation. His generosity and the fact that he never let his customers wager more than they could truly afford to lose, made him a very popular figure. Just a few weeks ago, Howard came across another record from his H. E. Mason Co. files, identifying yet another chip shipped in quantity and in different colors to Pat Murnan in 1935.

UFC 1096 is that chip, which bears only the address of Murnan's club: 13½. Although I have tried to do so, I have not been able to determine that Murnan's casino had a particular name, although that is not unusual for illegal clubs of the era. It was simply known as "Pat's" or "Pat Murnan's," and hotel bellman and cab drivers all knew where it was if asked.

1098



1099



UFC 1097 is another chip from Columbus which Howard Herz was able to identify from the H. E. Mason Co. records. **VSN** are the initials of Viaduct Sporting News, a large newsstand in the now-demolished Union Station, the railroad depot in Columbus. Despite inquiries, I have been unable to confirm that there was any sort of illegal gambling associated with the Viaduct Sporting News, and it may be that the chip was more a calling card than a gaming

check.

The next two chips are similar examples of chips which have been identified only because Herz was foresighted enough to preserve the records of the H. E. Mason Company. Without those records, it is unlikely that we would ever have known the true origin of these chips.

UFC 1098 bears the ornate initials **KD**. According to the Mason records, the chip was shipped to Keith Duckworth at the Glenn Hotel in Newport, KY. The colors and quantities indicate that these were more than mere private game chips. My research has not revealed who Keith Duckworth was, and it may be that the chips were not used at the Glenn Hotel (which was an illicit casino in the town across the Ohio River from Cincinnati), but rather in one of the many other illegal clubs in the Newport/Covington area.

UFC 1099 is similar: club member Gene Trimble, who actually worked in several of the illegal clubs in Newport, tells us that this chip was also shipped to Keith Duckworth at the Glenn Hotel. The meaning of the initials HOD (or, more likely, **HDO**) is not clear, and we aren't certain where the chips were used, but their presence in the area indicates that they may well have been used in one of the northern Kentucky clubs.

The remaining chips illustrated here are unidentified, and if you recognize them and can provide authoritative information about them, we'd like to hear from you!



In addition to those whose names have been mentioned above, members Kathi Lee and Michael Richter contributed to this issue's column.